

after dark. Those with means use generators. Poorer folks rely on candles.

Another milestone occurred when water was turned on in some areas. "Our children danced in the streets. Some who only knew that water came out of a bucket realized that it could come out of a tap," Sirleaf recalled.

Seldom has any country sunk as far as Liberia did under Taylor and the predecessor regime of Samuel Doe. During that 25-year period, per-capita income dropped from \$1,000 to \$120, according to the World Bank. Donor countries have been generous with pledges of assistance to Sirleaf's government but slow to fulfill them. She says: "We need to shorten the road between commitments and cash."

Health and education have been among Sirleaf's priorities. Official figures show that during her first year in office, the government increased school enrollment by 40 percent and provided school furniture throughout the country. Also, service is reported to have been restored to 350 health facilities in the country.

In a speech on March 27 in Toronto, Sirleaf highlighted other advances: deactivation of 17,000 members of the old security forces, enrollment of more than 75,000 excombatants in reintegration programs, accommodating the return of over 100,000 people who had been forced from their homes during the war, balancing of the budget and increasing government revenues by 48 percent.

Women are occupying more high government posts than ever before. Sirleaf, 68 and a grandmother of six, also is doing battle against Liberia's culture of corruption, requiring all senior level government officials to publicly declare their assets.

She has repeatedly told her countrymen that the most reliable path to prosperity is relief from Liberia's huge international debt. The subject is discussed on radio talk shows, street corners, bars and even hospitals.

Except for the periods of civil strife, the United States has had exceptionally close ties with Liberia, both symbolic and otherwise, almost from the founding of the country by freed American slaves in the 1840s. The capital, Monrovia, was named for James Monroe, the fifth American president. Liberia uses the dollar as its currency and may be the only country besides the United States and Burma to shun the metric system. A Liberian major general named George T. Washington once served as the country's top military officer. When the United States entered World War II, Liberia quickly announced its support. Among African countries, Liberia has often been among the major recipients of U.S. assistance.

The United States has been eager to help Sirleaf succeed. Appearing at an international donor conference sponsored by the World Bank in February, Rice announced the cancellation of Liberia's \$391 million U.S. debt. Other countries eliminated an estimated \$300 million in bilateral debt. When Sirleaf returned home from the conference, Liberians cheered her successes as they lined the road on her 30-mile ride from the airport to the capital. The cancellations reduced Liberia's debt to \$3 billion, the largest share of which is \$1.6 billion owed to international lending institutions. There is also a \$1 billion commercial debt.

For technical reasons, Liberia does not yet qualify for relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative, a 1996 International Monetary Fund-World Bank program designed to assist poor countries with unmanageable debts.

Anwarul K. Chowdury, an advocate at the United Nations for the interests of the world's poorest countries, says Liberia should be entitled to HIPC benefits because

of its "recent tumultuous history and current postconflict reconstruction efforts."

The Campaign to Cancel Africa's Debt, an activist group, believes it is an outrage that Liberia is being asked to continue making payments on the "odious and illegitimate" debt accumulated by Sirleaf's authoritarian predecessors. "Liberia needs 100 percent debt cancellation without harmful conditions in order to invest in its economy, rebuild the nation's infrastructure and fund essential public social services," the campaign said in a recent report.

In her Toronto speech, Sirleaf said Liberia's total liability is equal to over 3,000 percent of the country's exports. She is urging wealthy countries to come up with a formula for a prompt easing of the debt burden.

Even with generous debt relief, progress would be slow in coming. As an example, Sirleaf points to the decay of the tourism infrastructure. "The roads, the hotels, the lights, the water, all of those things that tourists will require for their comfort are not there yet," she says. Also, she adds, there is no easy path for securing electricity for rural areas. Pains-taking studies will be required just to determine whether hydroelectric power is the most suitable option.

Sirleaf believes that Liberia could become an agricultural power, citing its abundant fertile soil and rainfalls. Liberia has been a principal world market supplier of latex, derived from rubber trees. The country also is believed well suited for rice, oil palm, pineapples, cassava, citrus, coffee and cocoa. Other potential revenue producers are gold, iron ore, timber and diamonds. And U.S. investors are showing interest. A one-day conference on private investment opportunities, held in conjunction with the donors conference in February, drew an overflow crowd of 400 registrants.

Exports of timber were banned during Taylor's government by the U.N. Security Council because revenues were being used to finance the war in Sierra Leone. The ban was lifted last year, opening the way for a potentially lucrative market for Liberia. A Security Council prohibition on diamond exports remains in place pending certification that the stones are not used to finance conflict—as they were under Taylor's rule.

Shortly before Sirleaf's visit to Washington, she welcomed China's president, Hu Jintao, to Monrovia. There was no official account of the outcome but a Liberian official said beforehand that plans called for the signing of commercial agreements involving rubber, timber and minerals. Further demonstrating China's interest in the resource-rich country is the presence of 500 Chinese peacekeepers in Liberia. Sirleaf says she's happy to receive assistance from China, so long as it doesn't increase her country's debt.

HONORING THE RETIREMENT OF DR. SPINO

HON. TIM MURPHY

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, September 14, 2007

Mr. TIM MURPHY of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the medical career of Dr. Pascal Daniel Spino of Greensburg, PA.

After 60 years of serving the citizens of Greensburg as a pediatrician, Dr. Spino is retiring from practice. The genuine concern and compassion Dr. Spino gave his patients on a daily basis is appreciated more than words

can say. The sincere love and care his patients received should serve as a model to all who practice medicine.

Dr. Spino has had a truly remarkable career. But he is a modest man who would not boast about his many accomplishments or awards. So let me mention just a few. Always having a big heart for the less fortunate, Dr. Spino founded the first Well Baby Clinic in Westmoreland County which serves indigent children from birth to 6 years of age. The clinic provides free exams and immunizations to the indigent children of Southwestern Pennsylvania. Dr. Spino has personally manned the clinic since it began in 1954.

In 1970, when a patient, Jacob, was suffering from biliary atresia (a rare condition in newborn infants in which the common bile duct between the liver and the small intestine is blocked or absent), the townspeople of Greensburg, PA, responded generously with donations to help with the high medical costs. This tradition has carried on and the "Joy of Jacob" fund is still active and successful in helping to treat children with birth defects.

Dr. Spino took notice of abused children with no place to go. He felt for them and decided to take action in 1972, by founding the RANCH, or Render Any Needy Child Help program. A program designed solely to provide medical care for abused children. Dr. Spino then went on to create a Level II Nursery at Westmoreland Regional Hospital for the care of infants and helped create a modern pediatric department at Westmoreland Regional Hospital with intensive care capabilities.

Dr. Spino has received a number of awards including: Man of the Year by the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review for his outstanding service to the community; the Pennsylvania Pediatrician of the Year in 1989 by the Pennsylvania Chapter of the Academy of Pediatrics and was honored with "Doctor Spino Day," in Westmoreland County for his lifetime commitment to helping others. Over 4,000 people—1/4 of the City's residents were in attendance—despite a downpour of rain.

In my practice as a child psychologist, our paths have crossed several times over the years through our patients. I know first-hand the tremendous respect and affection patients and professionals alike have for Dr. Spino. I understand first-hand the joy of helping a child. I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Dr. Spino's career, personal sacrifice and devotion to improving our health care system and helping others.

SUPPORT OUR FRIEND AND ALLY: TAIWAN

HON. DONALD M. PAYNE

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, September 14, 2007

Mr. PAYNE. Madam Speaker, I rise in solidarity with the Republic of China (Taiwan). For over 50 years, Taiwan has been a flourishing, independent and sovereign government in the developing world and Southeast Asia. Taiwan has developed a world-class democracy, serving as a model for countries in the region. The people of Taiwan inspire others in Southeast Asia and around the world who desire freedom and prosperity. America should stand with our friends who engage in peaceful democracy and Taiwan deserves our support.